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ABSTRACT

Participants in an inservice workshop (n=121) and a graduate course in teaching the young handicapped (n=271) were surveyed concerning their perceptions of community attitudes toward the handicapped, the support school systems will provide for implementing P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act), and the current level of implementation in their local schools. Ss were located at 31 sites in Appalachia. Responses were analyzed by region, urbanization, and respondent's position of employment. Participants' perceptions of community awareness and the degree of school support were neutral to low. Forty-one percent of the course participants and 32% of the workshop participants reported mainstreaming currently taking place in their school. A significant effect was found for region in level of mainstreaming. Results were discussed in terms of the need to establish a data base of information for the successful implementation of P.L. 94-142, and the impact of public awareness and teacher attitudes was addressed. (Author)

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Mainstreaming and the Handicapped: Teacher, Administrator, and Community Attitudes

Paper Presented at the
Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

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Abstract

Participants in an in-service workshop (n=121) and a graduate course in teaching the young handicapped child (n=271) were surveyed concerning their perceptions of community attitudes toward the handicapped, the support school systems will provide for implementing of PL 94-142, and the current level of implementation in their local schools. Subjects were located at 31 sites in Appalachia. Responses were analyzed by region, urbanization, and respondent's positition of employment. Participants' perceptions of community awareness and the degree of school support were neutral to low. Forty-one percent of the course participants and 32% of the workshop participants reported mainstreaming currently taking place in their schools. A significant effect ($p < .05$) was found for region in level of mainstreaming. Results are discussed in terms of the need to establish a database of information for the successful implementation of PL 94-142. The impact of public awareness and teacher attitudes is addressed.

MAINSTREAMING AND THE HANDICAPPED: TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR, AND COMMUNITY ATTITUDES[1]

With the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in November, 1975, Congress mandated a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped children. This law represents a turning point in the history of the education and treatment of the handicapped by ensuring that all handicapped people have the right to receive a free, appropriate public education.

The enactment of the provisions of the law present an enormous challenge to educators, evaluators, and the community as a whole. The success of PL 94-142 is dependent upon the efforts of the schools and the communities to develop innovative programs, to train teachers, and provide resources in terms of materials and additional personnel to adequately meet the needs of the handicapped. The term "mainstreaming" is frequently used in reference to the law and its mandate. While the term mainstreaming is not mentioned in the Act, it is generally used to refer to the progressive inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classroom. Placement decisions are made with the goal of determining the most appropriate and least restrictive setting possible for each child. For purposes of this paper, mainstreaming is used in reference to situations in which supportive and supplementary resources are provided to the special child.

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While certain provisions of PL 94-142 are legally enforcable, e.g., notices to parents, the details of the implementation of mainstreaming programs are generally left up to the school system. In the worst situations, children could be placed in classrooms in which their needs are less adequately met than in more restrictive environments, in spite of the IEP, due to lack of materials and/or trained personnel.

Community attitudes and the leadership of school boards and administrators thus become strategically important. The responsibility of the educational evaluator then becomes one of providing the decision-makers with information both for planning and implementing mainstreaming, taking into account all the various plans which may be followed and the factors which influence the success of these plans.

The purpose of this paper is to describe (1) an assessment of teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward mainstreaming and (2) the need to establish a data base, to assist in the planning and evaluation of mainstreaming programs. A discussion of variables which might be included within this data base will be presented in the conclusion.

I would first like to address the importance of teachers' attitudes for the successful implementation of 94-142 by summarizing a few relevant research findings concerning teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward handicapped children.

As the provisions of 94-142 are relatively new, little research has been done concerning attitudes toward mainstreaming and the subsequent degree of implementation of the provisions in the schools. Related research has been concerned with teachers' attitudes toward the handicapped and teaching handicapped. This research has revealed that teachers do not have the necessary skills to work with handicapped children (Harasymiw & Horne, 1976; Reid & Dunn, 1976). Clark (1976) found teachers were misinformed and/or

uninformed about the characteristics of the handicapped child. Other studies concerning attitudes toward the handicapped child indicate teachers are often "afraid of the 'special' child" (Reid & Dunn, 1976); others indicate teachers tend to reflect the same negative attitude toward the handicapped that is prevalent in the general population (Pandra & Bartel, 1972).

The findings of these studies document the need for training in both the cognitive and affective domains. The study described here is designed to further survey teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming and the support they will receive in implementing PL 94-142. A basic premise of this survey is that the implementation of 94-142 will be heavily influenced by community support and, more specifically, administrative support for teachers during the initial period of implementation. As states and local communities are currently in different stages of implementation, this paper will survey the way in which mainstreaming is being implemented and teachers' perception of the support they are or will be receiving.

Method

Subjects for this survey consisted of two groups of participants at programs delivered via satellite to sites in Appalachia. The first group consisted of 121 participants at an educational workshop concerning public awareness of 94-142. These participants were gathered at 12 sites in Appalachia ranging from Fredonia, New York to Huntsville, Alabama. The second group consisted of 271 participants enrolled in a three credit-hour course, "Teaching the Young Handicapped Child: An Overview." Participants were located at 31 sites in Appalachia. Video portions of the workshop and were broadcast over the Appalachian Educational Satellite Program (AESP) network.

Prior to participating in the workshop or course, participants completed instruments requesting certain background and attitudinal information. Data were collected concerning participants' positions in education and the nature of the community in which they worked (rural, urban, suburban). The instrument required participants to choose from a list of statements those which most closely reflected: (a) their attitudes and experience with handicapped people; (b) the level of public awareness of the needs of the handicapped people in their community; (c) the degree to which their local school system will work toward the implementation of mainstreaming; and (d) the current level of implementation of mainstreaming in their local schools.

Frequency data for the two samples were analyzed separately due to differences in the samples in terms of their professional roles and their experience with exceptional children. Data were then analyzed by degree of urbanization and by position of respondent. Data for the second sample were also analyzed by region of Appalachia. Region was determined by the location of the site in Southern, Central, and Northern Appalachia. These regions were designated by the federal government to distinguish between regions within Applachia which differ in geographic, economic, social factors.

Results

Employment data for both samples revealed a mix of administrators, regular classroom teachers, special educators, social workers, Head Start teachers, and other school personnel. The workshop participants' positions in education reflected a greater professional involvement in issues related to the handicapped; 36% of the participants were special educators and another

12% were social workers in the field of special education. Ten percent were administrators and another 18% were regular educators. The course participants consisted of a larger proportion of regular educators, 54%; administrators constituted 5% of this audience and special educators, 18%.

The audience was primarily rural with 68% working in rural areas. This finding was expected as the Appalachian Educational Satellite Program is intended to serve the needs of rural Appalachians who have difficulty receiving in-service training by other means. In addition, the predominantly rural nature of the audience is representative of the Appalachian region. Sixteen percent of the participants reported working in urban areas and 15% in suburban areas.

Table 1 presents frequency data concerning respondents' experience and/or attitudes in working with handicapped children. Both samples report a rather high level of experience and involvement with handicapped people. The workshop participants were, as expected, more active in this area than the course sample ($\chi^2 = 12.73$; $p < .05$) with 66% reporting active involvement. However, the relatively high number of course participants reporting active involvement would suggest that this sample is an atypical sample of regular educators. Given that the participants voluntarily elected to attend these sessions, it is likely that their initial attitudes would be more favorable than those who did not attend. Due to this level of experience, it is posible to surmise that these samples are more aware of community attitudes and support for mainstreaming within the school system.

Table 2 reports respondents' perception of the level of public awareness of the needs of the handicapped in their community. Participants were asked to select from the following options the one which most closely represented

the level of public awareness of the needs of the handicapped in their community:

(1) Very high, an active effort is made to meet their needs in the public schools;

(2) High, an understanding of their needs is apparent;

(3) Neutral, most are not aware of the problem;

(4) Low, little effort is made to meet their needs through the public school system;

(5) Very low, there is active resistance to meeting the needs of the handicapped through the public schools.

The frequencies of responses to these items as depicted in Table 2 reflect a neutral to low public awareness of the needs of the handicapped as perceived by the workshop audience ($\bar{x}$ = 3.07; S.D. = .93). The course audience perceived public awareness as being slightly higher ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50; S.D. = .92). The positions of the two audiences may explain this difference in perception; the workshop sample, having greater day-to-day contact in their work with the issues relevant to this question may be more acutely aware of problems involved in meeting the needs of the handicapped through the public schools. As the workshop participants reported more activism in this issue, they may also be more sensitive to apathy on the part of the public than the course participants.

Data were analyzed by region of Appalachia, degree of urbanization, and position of respondent. No significant differences were found in perceptions of public awareness for these variables. These findings are somewhat surprising given the range of demographic variables in the samples.

Table 3 presents data concerning participants' perceptions of administrative support which will be provided to meet the demands of 94-142. Participants were asked to select from the following options the one which most closely

reflected their perception of the degree to which their local school system would work toward the implementation of mainstreaming:

(1) My community will work to initiate new innovative programs to fully meet the needs of handicapped individuals.

(2) My community will make changes to mainstream handicapped children through providing some instruction geared to their needs, but will not be able to implement innovative types of programs.

(3) My community will work to mainstream handicapped children, but will probably not be able to provide additional services to teachers to meet the special needs of the handicapped.

(4) My community would prefer not to work toward meeting the needs of handicapped people in the public schools.

The responses to this item as seen in Table 3 again reflect a neutral to pessimistic perception of the support schools will provide for meeting the demands of PL 94-142. This pessimism is particularly notable in the workshop sample in which 19.8% report that their local schools would prefer not to meet the needs of the handicapped. The course participants' perceptions are more optimistic, but remain somewhat divided. Thirty-two percent predict their schools will initiate new innovative programs while 28% predict no additional services will be provided to teachers to help meet the needs. The pessimism of the workshop sample may again be attributable to the greater sense of involvement and, hence, frustration, they may feel on this issue or a more accurate perception of the realities of the school environment given their work in this area.

Data were analyzed for interaction between respondents' perception of public awareness and school support for mainstreaming. A significant effect

($\chi^2 = 25.17$; $p < .01$) was found with those participants perceiving high public awareness reporting greater support within the school system. This finding is to be expected, but serves to provide support for the premise that public awareness is a key to successful implementation.

Data were again analyzed by region, degree of urbanization, and position of respondent. While no significant effects were found for these demographic variables, certain trends were noted. Participants from Central Appalachia tend to foresee the least assistance being provided to teachers for mainstreaming. Forty percent of respondents in Central Appalachia report the schools will provide no additional services to teachers to meet the needs of handicapped children; this figure contrasts with corresponding figures from participants in Northern and Southern Appalachian sites of 21.3% and 19.6%, respectively. Conversely, while 39% of the Southern respondents and 36% of the Northern respondents perceive innovative programs being initiated, only 18% of the Central Appalachian participants selected this response. This trend may be an accurate reflection of regional conditions as Central Appalachia is the most economically depressed of the Appalachian regions, hence, its schools are less able to provide the services found in other more prosperous areas.

Table 4 presents participants' reports of the level of mainstreaming in their local schools. Respondents were asked to select from the following options the one which most closely reflected the current level of implementation of mainstreaming in their local schools:

(a) Handicapped children are mainstreamed in regular classrooms for academic and non-academic work.

(b) Handicapped children are mainstreamed for non-academic activities (lunch, choir, extracurricular activities).

(c) Plans are being made to mainstream handicapped children.

(d) No plans have been made for the implementation of PL 94-142.

(e) I am unaware of the status of mainstreaming in local schools.

Responses to this item as seen in Table 4 reflect the varied levels of mainstreaming currently found in the Appalachian region. This mixture is to be expected given the timelines of the current legislation. As this question was designed to provide only a gross overview of the current status, we cannot draw conclusions concerning the types of children being mainstreamed nor the procedures being followed. One may be distressed or optimistic by the fact that 32% and 41% of the workshop and course samples report mainstreaming is currently occuring in academic settings. Given that this question was concerned with the school system as a whole and not with the respondents' individual school or classroom, I find the response rather disturbing.

Significant differences between regions in terms of current levels of mainstreaming were also demonstrated ($\chi^2 = 12.92$; $p < .05$). Examination of the data indicated that respondents from Central Appalachia reported the most extensive current level of mainstreaming; 76.5% report mainstreaming in academic settings; this contrasts to 52.9% of the Northern participants and 40.7% of the Southern participants selecting this option. This trend is noteworthy given the substantial proportion (40%) of Central Appalachians who perceived low school support for teachers in implementing mainstreaming and initiating innovative programs. The fact that many of these teachers are apparently already involved in mainstreaming would lend credence to their perception.

Another noteworthy regional trend concerns non-academic mainstreaming. Forty-four percent of the Southern respondents report non-academic mainstreaming as compared to 19.1% of Northern respondents and 11.8% of Central respondents. The frequency of mainstreaming in non-academic situations deserves further investigation. Is this policy followed as a first step in moving toward academic

mainstreaming when appropriate or is it viewed as an adequate response to the legislation in some areas? The significance of this data lies in the variation implicit in the responses. This variation points to the need for further research on the means of implementation for 94-142, i.e. types of settings employed, methods for making placement decisions, types of placement for different children.

Discussion

The data presented here is intended primarily to isolate areas for further investigation. The quasi-experimental nature of the data, based on reports or perceptions, limits the conclusions which may be drawn. Obviously, field-based research is now required. However, these perceptions are, in themselves, important due to the potential impact they have on the success of PL 94-142. These educators reveal low expectations in terms of community and school support to teachers to meet the needs of handicapped children mainstreamed into their classrooms. Whether these perceptions are accurate or not, these attitudes are ones which must be reasoned with in planning and evaluating the implementation of 94-142. Programs to increase community awareness, planning with teachers and administrators concerning necessary support, establishing feedback mechanisms for teachers to address problems which arise, and specifically addressing the skepticism seen here become important components of any mainstreaming program. These components are, in fact, equally as important as the basic training in techniques for working with exceptional children.

The variation exhibited in terms of different levels of implementation in different regions calls for more detailed field-based studies on ways in which mainstreaming is occuring. The ambiguities of the law, while necessary,

have created some problems in interpretation. State plans differ widely in their conception of means for implementation. The authors' experience suggests that some systems tend to place more emphasis on the "least restrictive" aspect of placement decisions while others focus on the "most appropriate" placement decision. Of course both components are necessary factors in the placement decision, but it is possible that the emphasis placed on one or the other of these requirements can create differences in means of implementation. The role of integration in non-academic settings deserves further investigation given its frequency in Southern Appalachia. Is this type of mainstreaming an effective transition phase toward meeting legislative requirements or is it viewed as a terminal objective in itself? Is the frequency of academic integration in Central Appalachia, a more rural and economically depressed area, a result of prompt and adequate planning or a result of simply dumping exceptional children in regular classrooms without providing training, facilities, and support to teachers to meet the needs of these children? Schools in many rural areas have in the past lacked the resources or facilities to provide special classes for handicapped children; the frequency of "mainstreaming" in Central Appalachia may be simply a continuation of the status quo with few resources being provided to meet their individual needs.

In summary, the legislative requirements of 94-142 may be met and mainstreaming implemented in a number of different ways. This is a virtue of the legislation in that programs may be designed to meet the needs and resources of particular communities. However, this again has an impact on the role of the evaluator in providing information for the planning of programs.

For the local evaluator data base information and data collection may be organized in terms of: (a) training provided to teachers and administrators;

(b) management procedures that are effective for the individual teacher in the classroom; and (c) management procedures that are effective in administrative terms. This last category would address procedures for placement decisions, types of support or assistance for teachers, alternative settings for mainstreaming, i.e., resource room, diagnostic-prescriptive settings. These data bases would be of two types. The data base for the planning phase would address current status and needs in the schools. Procedures which have been tried in other communities would be reviewed and appropriate plans suggested in each of the three areas. The second data base would be concerned with the formative stage of implementation, documenting performance in each of the three areas.

With the implementation of PL 94-142, educational evaluators are confronted with evaluating a myriad of new programs and services in the public schools. In order for these evaluations to be effective in terms of providing information to education decision-makers, a data base concerning community and school factors which may influence the successful implementation of mainstreaming should be developed.

The research described here is designed as a first step in this process. It is based on the premise that community attitudes and teacher attitudes will be instrumental in the success of PL 94-142. This research will be followed by continued assessments of mainstreaming through follow-up studies of AESP course participants. These studies will focus on the implementation of techniques taught in AESP courses in Appalachian schools. The information gathered here will serve as a data base for these studies. This research is facilitated through the AESP data base on the Appalachia region and the existence of permanent AESP receiving sites in Appalachia.

As the importance of community and teacher attitudes are demonstrated, inservice training and workshops can focus on changing teacher attitudes and instructing teachers and administrators in methods of educating the public to the needs of the handicapped.

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Table 1

Experience/Attitudes toward Exceptional Children

	Workshop (n=121)	Course (n=271)
Worked actively to improve education of handicapped	66.1%	47.6%
Aware of needs, but have not had opportunity to work with handicapped	18.2%	34.7%
Have not considered the issue	11.6%	11.8%
Fearful and uncertain of working with handicapped	4.1%	4.4%

Table 2

Ratings of Public Awareness of Needs of Handicapped People

	Workshop (n=121)	Course (n=271)
Very high, an active effort is made to meet their needs in the public schools	5.8%	16.2%
High, an understanding of the needs is apparent	14.9%	30.3%
Neutral, most are not aware of the issue	52.9%	42.1%
Low, little effort is made to meet their needs in the public schools	19.0%	10.3%
Very low, there is active resistance to meeting their needs in the public schools	7.4%	1.1%

Table 3

Ratings of School Support for Mainstreaming

	Workshop (n=121)	Course (n=271)
Will initiate innovative programs to fully meet needs	19.3%	32.1%
Will provide instruction geared to needs	29.8%	38.4%
Will not be able to provide additional services to teachers to meet special needs	30.6%	28.0%
Would prefer not to meet needs in public schools	19.8%	1.5%

Table 4

Current Level of Mainstreaming

	Workshop (n=121)	Course (n=271)
Mainstreamed in regular classrooms for academic and non-academic work	32.2%	40.6%
Mainstreamed for non-academic activities (lunch, extracurricular)	14.0%	20.3%
Plans are being made to mainstream	34.7%	17.0%
No plans have been made	.8%	5.2%
Unaware of plans	18.2%	17.0%